[0031]   Referring to Figure 1, gaming system 100 includes a several gaming locations 102, 104 and 106 that may include various non-machine games, such as craps and blackjack, or may include game machines, such as slot machines, video poker machines, video roulette machines, and the like.

[0032]   Gaming location 102 is exemplary of gaming locations 104 and 106. If gaming location 102 includes a gaming machine 102A, a game controller 108 and a game display 110 are provided. For both a non-machine gaming location and a game machine location, a location interface 112, an optional alphanumeric keypad 114 and a touch screen message display 118 are provided. Display 118 may comprise a touch screen liquid crystal display (LCD) similar to the displays used in laptop computers. Display 118 is coupled to or located inside the cabinet of gaming machine 102A, and may, for example, take the form of a rectangle about 3 inches high and 4 inches wide. Using an LCD inside a gaming machine in order to display graphics images and to display a numeric or alphabetic input image is advantageous because it eliminates the need for a separate keypad for

the interactive entry of data. In addition, an LCD requires less space than many other types of displays. These considerations are important, because there usually is very limited space inside or adjacent a gaming machine. An optional alphanumeric keypad 114 may be placed for convenient manipulation while a player is using gaming location 102.

[0033] A conventional graphics display controller 117 controls display 118. Controller 117 can display either vector graphics or bit-mapped graphics on display 118, depending the type of application program stored in memory 146 used for graphic display and the type of data stored for purposes of generating graphics images. The image data resulting in graphics images can be stored in memory 146 or can be stored in memory 121 and transmitted via network 126 to controller 117 for a particular graphic image. The image data can be either vector data or bit-mapped data. CPU 144 controls the transfer of the image data to controller 117 in response to application programs stored in memory 146 that determine the location of the graphics

images on display 118 and also determine the time at which the graphics displays are presented.

[0034]   Interface 112, optional keypad 114, controller 117 and display 118 comprise an interactive communication unit 119. Each of the gaming locations 104 and 106 include an interactive communication unit like unit 119. For example, gaming location 106 includes a communication unit 119A like unit 119. In one embodiment, a player enters alphabetic and numeric information by touching display 118. In such an embodiment, keypad 114 may not be provided. For the non-machine gaming locations, interface 112 comprises a communication controller 148, such as a modem.

[0035]   In this specification and claims, interactive means capable of accepting input from a human. Communication unit 119 comprises one or more programs for accepting such input from, for example, a touch screen alphanumeric keyboard image. Such programs are well known to those skilled in computer communication.

[0036]   For a game machine location, interface 112 may include, for example, an RS485 interface such as that implemented by a Sentinel™ Interface from Casino Data